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Survey Shows Support for Extension of Regional Sales Tax

PHOENIX (January 10, 2002) - A survey of Maricopa County voters indicates that there is solid initial support for the extension of a regional sales tax to fund transportation and transit improvements.

The half-cent sales tax, known as the Regional Area Road Fund, was approved by Maricopa County voters in 1985. The fund, which has been used to pay for the construction of the regional freeway system and to provide a small amount of funding for public transit improvements, is set to expire in 2005. There are proposals to extend this tax another 20 years to continue to meet the transportation needs of our rapidly-growing region.

In a survey conducted on behalf of the Maricopa Association of Governments and the Regional Public Transportation Authority, WestGroup Research found that 72 percent of respondents initially favored the extension of the sales tax beyond 2005. The number of respondents favoring the extension grew to 79 percent when researchers provided additional information about projected increases in population and vehicle travel, which could double average commute times in the region unless additional transportation investments are made.

When asked, "What do you think is the single most important issue the Valley needs to deal with in the next five years?" 23 percent of respondents cited public transportation/mass transit, while 18 percent identified traffic congestion as their top concern.

When asked to identify solutions to address the problems, responses included a number of options, including expanding light rail services throughout the county, building more freeways, improving local bus service throughout the county, and adding more lanes to the freeways within Maricopa County.

MAG Chairman Skip Rimsza says the initial survey results are encouraging. "If we fail to act, every single person in this region will experience a decrease in their quality of life due to the increased congestion. The results seems to indicate that citizens of this region recognize the importance of funding our continued transportation needs," he said.

The telephone survey involved more than 600 Maricopa County voters. As part of the public opinion research, five focus groups were also conducted by WestGroup. The results of the focus groups are also available for review.

For copies of the survey, or for more information, contact Kelly Taft, Communications Manager for the Maricopa Association of Governments at (602) 452-5020, or Bryan Jungwirth, Deputy Executive Director for the Regional Public Transportation Authority, at (602) 534-1803.